

abortion

Alabama Clergy for Choice

P. O. Box 320402 ■ Birmingham ■ AL ■ 35232

Phone (205) 592-3158

E-Mail: HN2734@HANDSNET.ORG

March 3, 1994

Dear Member of the Clergy:

You are being written as a concerned member of the clergy in the Birmingham area. Some of you were involved with us when Operation Rescue attempted to close the abortion clinics in Birmingham and few years ago. Others of you are known for your commitment to human rights and have been involved in caring and helping ministries in the local area.

Operation Rescue is coming to Birmingham for the Christian Passion week, from March 25th through April 2nd, the day before Easter. Their plan is to force the clinics to close, ending the availability of reproductive choice to Birmingham area women. Televised claims by a local priest that they are "just people from around the country" who are coming to "pray for the pre-born" are simply untrue.

The new leader of Operation Rescue, Rev. "Flip" Benham of Dallas, Texas, has already been to Birmingham, and actually entered Summit Medical Center, telling its administrator, Diane Derzis, that they are coming. He has announced nationally a "crusade" to close the clinics in Birmingham, and is actively promoting the assault. Blocks of hotel rooms have been reserved here in the name of Operation Rescue. They are definitely coming.

(If you haven't heard of "Flip" Benham, it is not surprising. Ken Tucci, the former leader, recently asked for a written pledge of non-violence from his high level followers [in the light of the murder of Dr. David Gunn, their image has suffered, and he felt it necessary to do this]. *They all refused* and he resigned, knowing that he had no authority. Benham has succeeded him and moved the headquarters to Dallas. **This is an Operation Rescue which does not even pretend to be non-violent.**)

Operation Rescue and its fellow organizations, operatives and allies have bombed and burned over two hundred clinics throughout the country. They have broken into clinics in Alabama. One nurse was permanently injured by anti-abortion criminal Fr. Edward Markley in Huntsville. In the light of new legislation making it more difficult to harass women trying to enter the clinics, and having lost the support of the U. S. Government with the defeat of George Bush, they have chosen to try to make abortion unavailable by stopping all doctors from performing abortions. This has been announced publicly.

- more -

Of offense to all of us, these people and organizations claim to own and control the deity we all worship and love. God, to them, is he who obeys their ideology. Since the press follows sensation and ignores the mainstream churches, Operation Rescue and its cohorts have been remarkably successful in getting this claim across to many people.

Operation Rescue and its allies often claim to stand within the tradition of the civil rights movement. It must be realized that the civil rights movement worked to extend rights to all people, especially oppressed people, whereas Operation Rescue is attempting to remove rights. Dr. Martin Luther King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led by Dr. Joseph Lowery, supports choice.

Whatever your opinion about abortion, we hope you join us in opposing Operation Rescue and its associates. We also hope that you join us in supporting the constitutional right of women to reproductive choice as that right has been spelled out by the U.S. Supreme Court and by law.

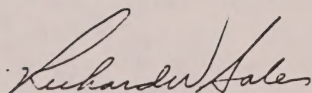
If so, we need your help at this time of crisis. **We would like for you to join us in signing the enclosed statement to the press, spelling out our opposition to Operation Rescue's attack upon Birmingham.**

We ask you to join in a prayerful, personal witness to keep the clinics open during this crisis. As clergy, our witness is powerful during such encounters. Not only will we be involved in keeping Birmingham's clinics open, but we will be a witness for the diversity and caring love of the institutions we represent. To do so, please sign the enclosed form and return it, stating your willingness to be a witness for freedom and choice.

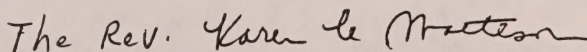
We ask you and your institution to support Alabama Clergy for Choice economically. "Freedom isn't free", as Dr. Martin Luther King often said. To contribute, use the enclosed form and make out checks to the Emergency Coalition for Choice.

We thank you for your concern. It is going to take the efforts of all people of faith to carry this country and this world forward to a time when we don't have to fight these battles any more. We are promised those times. Let us work to bring them in.

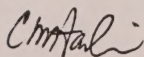
Sincerely yours,



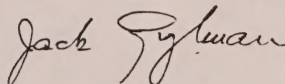
Rev. Richard Sales



Rev. Karen Matteson



Rev. Christopher Hamlin



Rev. Jack Zylman

Statement

We hold in high respect the value of potential human life; we do not take the question of abortion lightly. As clergy of diverse faiths and denominations, we hold varying viewpoints as to when abortion is morally justified. But it is exactly this plurality of beliefs which leads us to the conviction that the abortion decision must be made by the individual, on the basis of conscience and personal religious principles and free from government interference.

We respect the rights of those who differ from us and believe that abortion is never permissible. But we are inalterably opposed to the enactment of laws which would impose on all Americans a particular religious doctrine about the beginning of human life.

Roe v. Wade, the Supreme Court ruling which recognizes a woman's right to choose abortion, appropriately reflects the need of our society to respect moral and religious diversity and the dignity of women. We affirm this historic ruling and view the continued erosion and possible reversal of this decision with great alarm.

We pledge our strong support for reproductive choices which encompass the right to use contraceptives, the right to bring a pregnancy to term and keep the child, the right to put the child up for adoption, and if need be, the right to obtain safe and legal abortion services.

Alabama Clergy for Choice

P. O. Box 320402 ■ Birmingham ■ AL ■ 35232

Phone (205) 592-3158

E-Mail: HN2734@HANDSNET.ORG

☐ Please add my name to the Clergy for Choice statement. I understand that it will be released to the press and that it will be sent to the national office of Clergy for Choice.

☐ I will commit myself to be a personal witness for choice during the week of March 25, 1994 through April 2, 1994. Please inform me of details as to dates, times, places, and what will be done.

☐ Enclosed please find a contribution from me or my institution of faith for ☐ \$25.00
☐ 50.00
☐ 100.00
☐ _____

Name

Institution of faith

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Telephone

Coalition Against Religious Violence

P.O. Box 55535 Birmingham, Alabama 35255

Dear Person of Faith:

Recently, individuals have committed violence in the name of religion. Because they have used their religious convictions to legitimate their action, they have led many to believe that they represent all people of faith. In fact, most of us abhor this violence and have tried to maintain our distance by remaining silent.

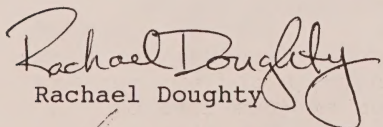
In this country, most of the religiously legitimated violence has taken place against individuals and facilities providing abortions. Two doctors and a volunteer have been killed. Another doctor and two clinic workers have been shot. Clinics have been bombed and individuals assaulted.

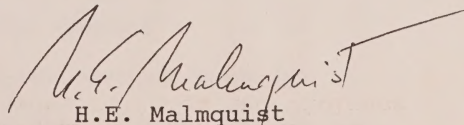
But silence is not the answer. We must not allow these people to define religion for us. Rather we must examine our faith and be willing to take a stand against violence.

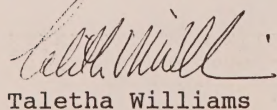
To that end, we have begun to organize a conference to examine the potential connection between religion and violence. We also feel that we must arm ourselves with as accurate information as possible so that we can speak intelligently when we counsel others. A third goal is to have the opportunity to discuss, with other people of faith, what we should do to break that link between religion and violence.

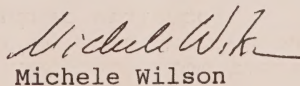
But we need more input from people of faith. In particular, we need help organizing the sessions in which attendees will be asked to discuss violence and their religious convictions and to examine themselves for a commitment to nonviolence.

If you or some member of your congregation is willing to spend time and help plan the conference, please call (205) 591-4352 or (205) 933-1174.


Rachael Doughty


H.E. Malmquist


Taletha Williams


Michele Wilson



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026 with funding from
CLIR DHC Grant 2026-2028

<https://archive.org/details/2174.02.50>

Coalition Against Religious Violence

P.O. Box 55535/ Birmingham, Al 35255
205-591-4352 or 205 933-1175

CONFERENCE ON: RELIGION, VIOLENCE & ABORTION

GENERAL PURPOSE: This conference is in reaction to the recent violence at abortion clinics, especially the deaths in Pensacola. It appears that the most violent individuals, i.e. those who endanger people, property and peace of mind use religion to legitimize their convictions and behavior. It seems to follow that members of the religious community would be most influential in countering rationalization of the use of violence. this conference is designed to commence and pursue a dialogue with the clergy and faith communities centered in Alabama, though we are including the entire southeastern region.

SPECIFIC PURPOSE: 1. To encourage personal examination of ideology and practice. 2. To provide education on the facts of abortion. 3. To facilitate an open discussion and exchange of ideas. 4. To find a morally sound collective basis for opposing violence as an answer to abortion. 5. To develop a plan of action as well as commitment to oppose violence.

We anticipate a minimum of 150 in attendance.

DATE: JANUARY 14, 1995

PLACE: CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA, BIRMINGHAM

TIME: 8:30 AM -5:00 PM

COST: \$10.00 PER PERSON (INCLUDES LUNCH & SNACKS)

PRELIMINARY PROGRAM:

8:30- 9:00: Registration, fellowship & coffee.

9:00- 9:30: The Occasion, LORI SHEPARD, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

9:30-11:00: VIOLENCE:

A. "Is Violence Ever Justified? A Philosophical Dialogue"

B. "What is Religious Terrorism" Dr. TERRY PREUITT, co-author The Gideon Project.

11:00- 12:30: ABORTION FACTS & FIGURES:

A. "Abortion Then & Now" DR. CLARIECE GREEN, Centers For Disease Control & Prevention.

B. "Fetal Development and The Abortion Procedure" VIRGINIA VOLKER, Anatomy Professor, UAB. And DR. CHARLES FLOWERS, UAB.

12:30- 2:00: LUNCH & SMALL DISCUSSION GROUPS:

"DEFINING THE PROBLEM WITHIN THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY"

2:00- 3:30: RELIGION:

A. "The Nature of Fundamentalism" BUNNIE REIDEL, Americans United for Separation of Church & State.

B. "Clergy Counseling Training" JEAN STEWART BERG, Religious coalition for Reproductive Choice.

3:30- 5:00: DEVELOPMENT OF A PLAN OF ACTION:

A. Small Discussion Groups

B. Synthesis and Reports to the Conference

C. The Challenge: Final Thoughts & Commitments

